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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 /066 W
----------116323 251924Z /47
R 251844Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2136
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY LISBON
USMISSION USNATO
DIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
USMISSION USBERLIN
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 16757

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: THE SUCCESSION TO FRANCOIS MITTERRAND

SUMMARY: "FRANCOIS MITTERRAND IS NOT A HAPPY MAN",
SAYS PS NATIONAL SECRETARY ROBERT PONTILLON. FACED
WITH THE FACT THAT HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE POLITICAL
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SCENE IS POSSIBLE, EVEN LIKELY, BEFORE THE 1981 PRESI-
DENTIAL CONTEST, MITTERRAND HAS BEEN UNABLE TO MOLD A
SUCCESSOR AMONG HIS OWN FOLLOWERS AND NOW SEES THE PARTY
DESTINED TO FALL UNDER THE CONTROL OF EITHER PIERRE MAU-
ROY OR MICHEL ROCARD, NEITHER OF WHOM IS TO HIS LIKING.
MITTERRAND WILL RUN IN 1981 ONLY IF VICTORY IS ASSURED;
PONTILLON, ALONG WITH NUMEROUS OTHER PS CONTACTS, DOES

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NOT THINK MITTERRAND CAN WIN AND THAT CONSEQUENTLY THE SUCCESSION MUST BE DECIDED SUFFICIENTLY IN ADVANCE TO LAUNCH A VIABLE SOCIALIST CANDIDACY. ALTHOUGH MITTERRAND'S DEPARTURE BEFORE THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS OF JUNE 1979 WOULD BE SURPRISING, THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT EVERY PS DECISION FROM NOW ON WILL BE HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY THE SUCCESSION STRUGGLE AND THAT MITTERRAND HIMSELF WILL WIELD PREDOMINANT POWER IN THAT BATTLE. END SUMMARY.

1. A CHANGE IN ATMOSPHERE: BREAKING WITH PAST EXPERIENCE, SEVERAL WELL-PLACED SOCIALIST OFFICIALS HAVE SHOWN INCREASED WILLINGNESS TO TALK PRIVATELY DURING THE PAST WEEK ABOUT THE SUCCESSION TO FRANCOIS MITTERRAND'S POSITION AS PARTY FIRST SECRETARY. HERETOFORE TABOO, PARTICULARLY IN THE PRE-ELECTORAL PERIOD WHEN MITTERRAND'S PREDOMINANT ROLE WAS CRUCIAL TO PS CREDIBILITY VIS-A-VIS THE COMMUNIST MACHINE, THE SUBJECT HAS NOW SHIFTED FROM THE REALM OF THE UNTHINKABLE TO THAT OF THE INEVITABLE. IT IS CLEAR THAT MITTERRAND WILL RUN FOR THE PRESIDENCY IN 1981 ONLY IF VICTORY SEEMS NEARLY CERTAIN; MOST PS CONTACTS, IN ALL PARTY FACTIONS, DO NOT BELIEVE THAT MITTERRAND CAN DEFEAT GISCARD, HENCE THE RECOGNITION THAT THE SUCCESSION MUST BE ACCOMPLISHED SUFFICIENTLY IN ADVANCE IN ORDER TO FIELD A VIABLE CANDIDATE WHO CAN FINISH AHEAD OF THE PCF AND LEAD THE PS
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TO GREATER HEIGHTS THEREAFTER.

2. SEVERAL SOURCES HAVE REMARKED ON THE OBVIOUS CHANGES IN MITTERRAND'S BEHAVIOR SINCE THE MARCH ELECTIONS, CHARACTERIZING HIM AS QUICK TO ANGER, MORE SENSITIVE TO WHAT HE PERCEIVES AS PERSONAL LOYALTIES OR DISLOYALTIES, AND LESS CAPABLE OF FOCUSING ON THE SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES AT HAND; HIS LACKLUSTER PERFORMANCE AT THE APRIL 29 CONVENTION WAS PARTICULARLY NOTED. UNDENIABLY, A PERIOD OF DECOMPRESSION AND WITHDRAWAL IS NORMAL FOLLOWING THE INTENSIVE DAILY ENGAGEMENT OF THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN AND MATCHES MITTERRAND'S BEHAVIOR FOLLOWING THE 1974 PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST. THIS TIME, HOWEVER, THE SUCCESSION QUESTION PUTS A DIFFERENT LIGHT ON THE ISSUE BECAUSE IT IS MORE EVIDENT THAN EVER BEFORE (EVEN TO THE PS LEADER HIMSELF) THAT MITTERRAND WILL NOT LAST FOREVER.

3. MAUROY OR ROCARD?: PONTILLON SPOKE AT SOME LENGTH OF THE SUCCESSION STRUGGLE IN A MAY 24 TALK WITH THE DCM AND AN EMBASSY OFFICER, EMPHASIZING THAT "MITTERRAND IS NOT A HAPPY MAN." HE HAS TRIED OVER THE YEARS

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TO GROOM A SUCCESSOR (E.G., MERMAZ OR BEREGOVOY) BUT
WITHOUT SUCCESS. IT IS NOW TOO LATE, SO THAT CONTROL
OF THE PS IS NEARLY CERTAIN TO PASS TO SOMEONE OUTSIDE
OF THE MITTERRAND CIRCLE. MITTERRAND HIMSELF HAS
PUBLICLY SAID THAT EITHER PIERRE MAUROY (50 YEAR-OLD
DEPUTY, MAYOR OF LILLE, HEAD OF THE POWERFUL NORD-
PAS-DE-CALAIS FEDERATION) OR MICHEL ROCARD (48 YEAR-

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OLD DEPUTY, NOTED ECONOMIST, PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE FOR
THE PSU IN 1969) SEEMS MOST LIKELY TO ASSUME THE REINS

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OF POWER. HE DOES NOT LIKE THE PROSPECT OF EITHER, BUT
HAS NO BETTER ALTERNATIVE TO PRESENT.

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4. PS CANDIDATE IN 1981: IN THE EYES OF MOST SOCIA-
LISTS, THE TRANSITION, IF THERE IS TO BE ONE, MUST BE
MADE BEFORE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. PONTILLON DOES
NOT BELIEVE THAT MITTERRAND WILL BE THE CANDIDATE AND,
EVEN THOUGH A LONG-TIME MAUROY BACKER, HE LEANS TOWARD
ROCARD AS THE BEST CHOICE FOR THE PARTY. THAT FEELING
IS SHARED BY FRANCOISE GASPARD (MAYOR OF DREUX) WHO HAS
JUST CREATED A THIRD, OSTENSIBLY WOMEN'S FACTION WHICH
WILL COMPETE WITH THE MITTERRAND MAINSTREAM AND THE
LEFT0WING CERES FOR PARTY SUPPORT. GASPARD IS PERSON-
ALLY CLOSE TO MITTERRAND, BUT TOLD EMBOFF MAY 23 THAT
ROCARD IS THE ONLY LOGICAL CHOICE FOR 1981. "1988 WILL
BE TOO LATE," SHE SAYS. "ROCARD HAS TO MOVE IN 1981,
FOR THE GOOD OF THE PS." IN THAT CONTEXT, HER FACTION
(WHICH WILL INCLUDE A MALE ELEMENT AS WELL) WILL ALSO
SERVE AS A CHANNEL FOR ROCARD SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY
IMPORTANT SINCE ROCARD HIMSELF FOR POLITICAL REASONS
CANNOT TAKE THE STEP OF ORGANIZING AN OFFICIAL FACTION.

5. BUT WHILE ROCARD CLEARLY HAS IMPORTANT SUPPORT
WITHIN THE PARTY, ESPECIALLY AMONG THE MORE PRAGMATIC
POLITICIANS FOR WHOM MAUROY'S LACK OF CHARISMA IS AN
OBVIOUS DISQUALIFYING FACTOR FOR THE PRESIDENCY, HIS
OPPOSITION IS JUST AS STRONG. MITTERRAND HIMSELF WENT
TO UNUSUAL LENGTHS TO HEAD OFF ROCARD'S ATTEMPT TO TAKE
CHARGE OF THE NEW SOCIALIST EFFORT IN ORGANIZING THE
WORKPLACE, ASSUMING CONTROL OF THE OPERATION HIMSELF
(TO THE ASTONISHMENT OF EVERYONE IN THE PARTY) SIMPLY
TO DENY THE POSITION TO ROCARD. PONTILLON CHARACTERIZED
MITTERRAND'S HOSTILITY AS THE NORMAL REACTION OF A 62
YEAR-OLD LEADER IN THE FACE OF A 48 YEAR-OLD CHALLENGER,
PARTICULARLY A LEADER WHO CANNOT EASILY RECONCILE HIM-
SELF TO THE NECESSITY TO STEP DOWN. "PREPARING A SMOOTH
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TRANSITION" IS ALWAYS ADVICE BETTER GIVEN THAN RECEIVED.

6. LONG-TERM STRATEGY: OBVIOUSLY, THE SUCCESSION ISSUE
WILL BE A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN EVERY FUTURE PS DECISION.
THE STAKES ARE HIGH, HOSTILITIES RUN DEEP. THE "IDEAL"
SOLUTION FOR MANY SOCIALISTS -- MAUROY AT THE HELM OF

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THE PARTY, ROCARD AT THE ELYSEE -- WILL BE HARD TO IMPLEMENT. ONCE IN CONTROL OF THE PARTY, WOULD MAUROY THEN WANT THE ELYSEE AS WELL? ONCE AT THE ELYSEE, WOULD ROCARD LEAVE THE PARTY TO MAUROY? THE MANEUVERING WILL BE DELICATE WITH LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES BECAUSE IT IS RARE, IN THE EXISTING ATMOSPHERE, TO FIND A SOCIALIST WHO BELIEVES GISCARD CAN BE BEATEN IN 1981. THE PS CANDIDACY IS THEREFORE THE BEGINNING OF A SEVEN-YEAR STRATEGY, LAUNCHING A NEW NATIONAL FIGURE WHO CAN LEAD THE PARTY AT LEAST UNTIL 1988.

7. THE PERSPECTIVE IS CURIOUS FOR A PARTY WHICH HAD BELIEVED IN VICTORY ONLY TWO MONTHS AGO BUT NOW SENSES THAT THE POLITICAL CARDS HAVE BEEN REDEALT,AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, IN GISCARD'S FAVOR. NONETHELESS, THE REACTION IS NOT ONE OF COMPROMISE OR CAPITULATION, BUT OF BUILDING ONCE AGAIN FOR THE FUTURE. THE CHOICE OF PERSONALITIES IS AT ONCE THE MOST EMOTIONAL AND THEREFORE MOST DANGEROUS PART OF THAT PROCESS AND ONE IN WHICH MITTERRAND WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY THE CENTRAL ROLE.
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